The truth about the Mau Mau Uprising

Foreign Secretary William Hague has announced in Parliament compensation for Mau Mau activists in Kenya during the 1950s. But were these men really victims?

The announcement that the British Government is to pay compensation to Mau Mau detainees was made in the House of Commons by Foreign Secretary William Hague. These people are routinely referred to by the usual suspects as freedom fighters, but was this really the case? To *Socialist Worker* and other "radical" publications, this was simply another case of the hated British abusing colonial peoples who had been reduced to poverty, seeing their countries exploited as cash cows in order to fill their Imperialist coffers with ill-deserved lucre. How different the true facts.

Kenya was developed by a combination of Arabs and later whites, especially farmers. Its native language, Swahili, had no written form, and the development of civilisation in any meaningful sense is generally considered impossible without a script. From 1895, the British ruled the country, then known as the East African Protectorate, and white farmers invested heavily in it. Many Indians also emigrated to the new country, initially as manual workers, but moved into trades and started businesses, wherein they prospered.

Because of the lack of a sufficient bedrock of educated natives, the British Government adopted a paternalistic approach to the country, but it was never intended for Kenya to be a "subject nation" indefinitely. This was made clear in the 1923 White Paper *INDIANS IN KENYA. MEMORANDUM.*, (Cmd. 1922).

At page 10 it was stated: "Primarily, Kenya is an African territory, and His Majesty's Government think it necessary definitely to record their considered opinion that the interests of the African natives must be paramount, and that if, and when, those interests and the interests of the immigrant races should conflict, the former should prevail. Obviously the interests of the other communities, European, Indian or Arab, must severally be safeguarded...But in the administration of Kenya His Majesty's Government regard themselves as exercising a trust on behalf of the African population, and they are unable to delegate or share this trust, the object of which may be defined as the protection and advancement of the native races."

Seven years later, this commitment was reaffirmed in another White Paper, *MEMORANDUM ON NATIVE POLICY IN EAST AFRICA* (Cmd 3573).

Page 4: "The task and the duty of government in East Africa is...two-fold...On the one hand, it must be the aim of the administration of every territory with regard to all the inhabitants, irrespective of race or religion, to maintain order, to administer justice, to promote health and education, to provide means of communication and transport, and generally to promote the industrial and commercial development of the county. In all this range of work persons of every race and of every religion, coloured no less than white, have a right to equal treatment in accordance with their several needs."

East Africa was to be held "in trusteeship for the native races" who were "not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world".

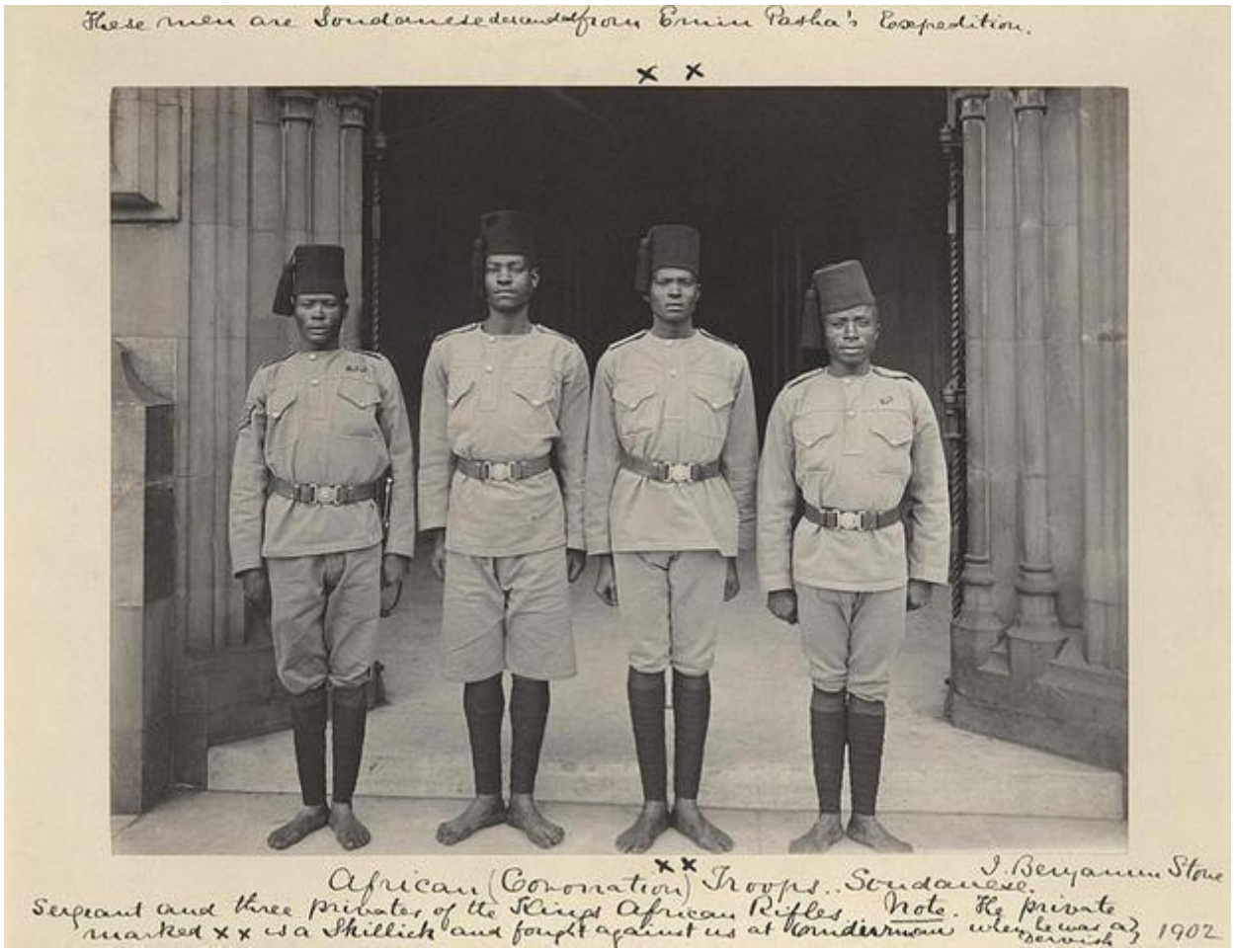
Obviously not everyone was impressed by this idealism, because a mere 22 years later a so-called independence movement launched a bloody uprising which was put down – as the British were wont – with the utmost severity.

It is easy for persons of a certain political persuasion to look back on this with anger, but the alternative was a bloodbath of unimaginable proportions, not only of white settlers but of anyone who got in the way of this bloodthirsty movement.The Mau Mau Uprising resulted from a grievance that was made up from the whole cloth. As Frank Kitson explained in his book *Low Intensity Operations*: "The people of a country can only be made to rise up against the authorities by being persuaded of the need to do so, or by being forced into doing it. Usually those involved in organizing subversion envisage replacing the authorities ultimately, and ruling in their stead...", (page 4).Kitson had joined the Rifle Brigade in January 1945, serving in Occupied Germany. He arrived in Kenya in September 1953, and was promoted to major. He said of the Mau Mau it was "One of the most remarkable instances of a cause being manipulated, if not invented, in order to make a wide appeal...educated African nationalists clearly wanted to get control of the government so as to steer the country towards independence". They had a problem because "they realized that such an idea was far too vague to appeal to the tribally minded people of the time. They therefore decided to concentrate on one relatively minor grievance which existed by reason of the fact that when the country had been settled by Europeans in the first decade of the present century, a very small area of Kikuyu land had been occupied because, at the time, there were no Kikuyu living there. None of the other land settled had ever belonged to this tribe, and the arrangements made with the other tribes concerned had been perfectly satisfactory...Night and morning prayers were offered up for the recovery of the stolen land whilst those praying held aloft a handful of sacred soil. The Mau Mau gangs were known collectively as the Kenya Land Freedom Army and many of their songs centred around this crucial issue. In the end thousands gave their lives for it, neither knowing nor caring that the original area only extended to a few square miles. In their minds they had come to regard any land occupied by a European as their land..."

What is conveniently forgotten today is that the majority of Kenyans had little or no sympathy for the Mau Mau realising that under British rule they had never had it so good. In the *INTRODUCTION* to his 1956 official biography of the King's African Rifles, Lieutenant-Colonel H. Moyse-Bartlett wrote "It is hoped that this account of the origins, development, and fighting record of a colonial regiment will reveal something of the part played by the African himself in helping to lay and preserve the foundations of British rule in Africa, a factor that has been too little regarded in the past."

The King's African Rifles were instrumental in putting down the insurrection.

A rather more objective view of the fight against the Mau Mau terror than that currently being peddled by the BBC was given three years ago by [someone who fought against it](#).


These men are Soudanese descendants from Emin Pasha's Expedition.
x x
J. Benjamin Stone
African (Coronation) Troops. Soudanese.
Sergeant and three privates of the King's African Rifles marked x x is a Skillich and fought against us at Kondiawmoa
Note. Ke private who was at Lokitch
1902

Members of the King's African Rifles. The regiment, formed January 1, 1902, consisted of 104 white officers, and 4,579 native officers and men. Contrary to the propaganda peddled today, these men were loyal servants of the British Empire. Half a century later, the regiment was instrumental in putting down the contrived Mau Mau Uprising.

[The above op-ed was first published June 7, 2013. The first photograph is a stock photograph; the second was added by me. A PDF has replaced the previously linked article from *Socialist Worker*; a citation mistake has also been corrected. In the original, I attributed the quotes by Frank Kitson to his 1960 book *Gangs and Counter-gangs*; these are actually from *LOW INTENSITY OPERATIONS...* as can be seen above. When I read these books back in the 1990s, I made notes on them both, which I kept in the same *WordStar 6* file. I have today found copies of both books on-line, and the latter has been added here from the Internet Archive – July 8, 2021.]